COPD and You: Taking Ownership of Your Disease

by RUSSELL WINWOOD

My COPD: Taking Ownership of Your Condition

As many of you know, I am a big advocate of patients embracing their disease in order to be more proactive in how they manage their disease. Do you take ownership of your COPD or do you prefer to leave it in the hands of your doctor?

Why Take COPD Ownership?

Since very early on in my COPD journey, I realized if I was to depend entirely on my doctors for the management of my disease then I was probably going to be devoured by COPD.

Don’t get me wrong, and most doctors do a great job with their patients given the time restraints they have on consultations. But if your visit to your doctor is every three to six to twelve months – what are you doing in between visits to help yourself?

This is where taking ownership of your disease becomes very important. There are many strategies you can implement in between doctors’ visits which will improve your quality of life. Naturally, these strategies would have to be cleared with your doctor first to make sure you weren’t putting yourself in harm's way.

The fact is, if you take ownership and embrace your COPD then you will have a far better outcome than a patient who is prepared to rely on their routine doctor’s visits.

COPD and Implementing Change

If you are reading this and realizing you don’t do enough in between doctor’s visits, then there is no time like the present to make the change.

For me, taking ownership of my disease started by personalizing it. When I refer to my disease, I like to call it “My COPD.” This, in my mind, automatically gives me ownership and when you own something, you’re responsible for it.

Think of it like this, if you have always looked at your doctor as the boss of your disease and you are a piece of the puzzle, try flipping it around. You’re now the boss of your condition and your doctor is a piece of the puzzle, a critical part.

COPD Ownership Strategies to Implement

Now you are responsible for your disease, and how it is managed, you can start implementing some strategies.

Writing a List for Your Doctor

The number one strategy is writing a list for your doctor. Your doctors are a wealth of knowledge and your time spent with them should be used efficiently.

Don’t be one of those patients’ doctors spend half their consultation time fishing for information. Be prepared and have a list. In between doctor’s visits things will crop up which you will want to know about, there will also be things worth sharing with your doctor.

Examples of this could be a change in COPD symptoms and how you feel. Telling your doctor about these events may well lead to a quick solution which gives you more time to pick their brain on other questions you have. If you want to enroll in pulmonary rehabilitation, you will need a clearance and referral from your doctor.

As you tick off the questions for your doctor, you are now assigning tasks for you as the boss of your disease to complete. You will be amazed at how many patients have told me taking this path has made them feel more in control of their disease.

You'll Become More Engaged on How to Improve Your COPD Symptoms

The other benefit you will find by taking ownership of your COPD is your doctor will likely become more engaged with ways you can improve your symptoms. In my experience, doctors will always be more willing to help if you are seen to be trying.

Using this strategy shouldn’t be viewed as a temporary measure, it should be viewed as part of your preparation for your next doctor’s appointment. If you think you’ll run out of questions, think again. I have been doing this for seven years and still have a long list of questions each time I have my doctor’s appointment.

The Benefits of COPD Ownership

There are six benefits of owning your COPD:

- Feeling in control
- Improved management of symptoms
- Less anxiety
- Better relationship with your doctor
- More tools to fight your COPD
- Better quality of life

If you weigh up the pros and cons of owning your COPD, you will soon see there is have nothing to lose by embracing your disease. I have never heard of or seen a patient’s health deteriorating because they have chosen to improve how they manage their disease.

Importantly being seen as a proactive patient to your friends and family will change the way they look and feel about you. As I’ve said in the past – do you want to be pitied because of what your disease is doing to you or admired for how you manage your condition?

Becoming an expert on Your COPD is the most important step in what I call "the four pillars of living well with COPD: knowledge, medication, nutrition, and exercise." Make these pillars an integral part of your life, and I have no doubt you will be breathing easier!